

My name is Nicole Walker and I am the Director of Apple Tree Learning Centers in Stowe Vermont. I have worked at Apple Tree for 21 Years. We have 4 Licensed programs, two are new as of 2023 and are working on increasing their stars from a level 1 to a 3 Star program. Our other two licenses are 5 Star and one is NAEYC accredited, which stands for National Association for the Education of Young children. Given that we are NAEYC accredited in one of our programs, we run all of our programs as if they hold the same credential as we value those standards and the level of quality that comes with being accredited. We are also a Licensed public Pre K program through Agency of Education and have been since this program first launched.

At Apple Tree Learning Centers we strive for high quality programming for all age groups and programs, and with that comes standards we have for our early educators. We require our Lead Educators to have a minimum of an Associates in Early Education or a related field, in fact many have Bachelors degrees and even teaching licenses. We have 39 Early Educators that work for Apple Tree Learning Centers, 4 have a Masters, 17 Teachers have a BA/BS degrees, 4 with BA's have a Teaching License, 3 are working towards BA/BS, 2 have an AA, and 2 are working on a AA. All other staff have credits in Early Education or a related field and are considering taking the steps needed to get credits turned into a degree or credential.

Apple Tree Learning Centers has 3 Preschool classrooms and all of those classrooms has a Licensed teacher that works full time, Monday through Friday 40 hours per week. One program has two licensed teachers, while the other two have 1, however majority of my preschool teachers are those with a 4 year degree or higher. This alone speaks to the quality of our preschool programs.

Having programs such as Apple Tree Learning Centers available for families offers them options for full day year round programming for their children. Our program is open year round, with minimal school closings. In fact we were approached by our local superintendent to open a half day afternoon program for two schools to help offset the need for full time schooling for families. We have since opened one program which covers public school closings and half day programming and we continue to receive calls and emails to open one in another town to help offset those days and times not offered by the public school. This is something we are considering in the future.

Programs such as Apple Tree Learning Centers offers a vast amount of flexibility for families, especially those that need full time year round schooling, or have a specific preference based on needs or desires for the family. Often times these students have been with our program since 7 weeks of age, and their desire to transfer to a different preschool is nonexistent. They are comfortable and confident with our educators, they value our philosophy, they desire and need full time programming, and most important their children are settled and have connections made within our program, therefore they see no reason to transfer elsewhere. Given that we offer high quality schooling for their children, they are in no rush to transition until they need to when they go to Kindergarten. Our curriculum, while being play based, is enriching, adventurous, Outdoor based, child lead, educational and diverse and targets all areas of development including but not limited to: Gross and Fine motor, cognitive, language and social/emotional development.

Apple Tree Learning Center is an example of high quality education, and our teacher qualifications are beyond the expectations for licensing, therefore we are a perfect example of a mixed delivery system that not only works, but excels. This can be true for not only our program, however several around the state of Vermont. As we continue to work towards professionalizing the field of Early Education, keeping this mixed delivery system supports that goal completely.

Nicole Walker